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(No) News from the Western Front: The Weekly Press of the Low Countries and the Making of Atlantic News

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News from the Atlantic world was a key ingredient in early printed European newspapers. This article investigates the rhythm of Atlantic reporting in two weekly corantos from the Low Countries, one produced in Amsterdam, the other in Antwerp. It studies the serial production, dissemination, and reception of news from the “Western front” in the year 1630, when both the Dutch West India Company and the Habsburg monarchy experienced a blend of victories and disappointments. Partiality and different conceptions of credibility determined how events were covered on opposite sides of the border. Through careful analysis of two newspapers, and the assessment of their Atlantic bulletins by a well-informed reader, this article will argue that a culture of anticipation shaped the circulation of news from Brazil and the Caribbean. This explains why the press in the Netherlands produced regular bulletins even when there was no news, and why few stories were covered so extensively as those from the Atlantic world.

ON SATURDAY, 5 JANUARY 1630, the Amsterdam publisher Jan van Hilten issued his first newspaper of the new year. The *Courante uyt Italien ende Duytschlandt* (Coranto from Italy and Germany), a single sheet of paper of which both sides were densely printed, appeared every Saturday. It typically contained rumors and reports from all major battlefields in Europe and in the Atlantic world, where the Dutch West India Company had opened a second front in the war against Habsburg Spain. *Courante* no. 1, the first issue of the new year, brought three snippets of Atlantic information. First, Van Hilten related how two Dutch squadrons had fired shots at the Spanish fortress in Havana. Then he reported that Don Fadrique de Toledo, captain-general of the royal Indies fleet, had sent twelve vessels to the Virgin Islands to remove the Dutch from the area. More details, Van Hilten promised his readers, were to follow in the next issue. The third report concerned a ship of the West India Company that had anchored in England with a sizeable booty from Brazil, including four hundred crates of sugar. On its return voyage it had encountered a Dutch fleet in the Canary Islands. Despite

Research for this article was facilitated by the generous support of The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

having been dispersed by a storm, the fleet would reassemble near Cape Verde, and continue its mission as planned.¹

None of the three stories would qualify as “breaking news” by any stretch of the imagination, but it must have pleased Van Hilten that he had managed to produce some Atlantic information that was fit to print. The market for news in the United Provinces during the country’s golden age was highly competitive: weekly newspapers appeared in several towns, and Amsterdam had been a two-paper city for more than ten years. The other local coranto, *Tijdingen uyt verscheyden Quartieren* (Tidings from various quarters), issued by Van Hilten’s principal rival, Broer Jansz, did not contain any Atlantic reports in the opening weekend of 1630, which made Van Hilten’s information infinitely more valuable.² But beating the competition was only part of the challenge he faced every week. Readers were very knowledgeable regarding maritime affairs and could not be fooled with misinformation. Ordinary sailors on the Amsterdam waterfront spread all sorts of maritime rumors, while the regent elite in the decentralized political framework of the United Provinces could not stop the leaking of sensitive information. In this atmosphere of openness, newspaper stories could be contradicted and thrown into doubt within hours of their appearance. Conflicting information could even arrive from abroad, for example from the southern Netherlands where another regular newspaper, the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* (Weekly tidings), was issued in Antwerp by the publisher Abraham Verhoeven. This coranto, one half-sheet of paper folded once so as to create a four-page pamphlet, reported on the same events from a Spanish perspective. Predictably, the news media on opposite sides of the border covered the war in the Atlantic in very different ways.

In the fifty-one corantos that were to follow that year, Jan van Hilten closely monitored developments in the Atlantic world. Nearly every week he provided fresh information, a remarkable achievement given the irregular arrival of news from the Western front. Thanks to an unusual bit of good fortune, all fifty-two issues for the year 1630 have survived and are preserved together in the Royal Library in The Hague.³ Even more strikingly, the Royal Library in Brussels holds a complete series of Abraham Verhoeven’s *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* for the same year. Verhoeven tended to print a new issue as soon as he had enough material to fill four pages, but in 1629 he settled on a weekly rhythm as well. Since he produced multiple issues on the same day, there are no fewer than 122 issues of the Antwerp newspaper for the year 1630. New corantos appeared on fifty-four different

¹Jan van Hilten, *Courante uyt Italien ende Duytschlandt &c.*, no. 1 (Amsterdam, 5 January 1630). All translations from Dutch into English are the author’s.

²Broer Jansz, *Tijdingen uyt verscheyden Quartieren*, no. 1 (Amsterdam, 5 January 1630).

³Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, 341 A 1, a contemporary collection of Van Hilten’s *Courante*, containing all fifty-two issues of 1630. The anonymous owner added a handwritten title page: “Nieuws Tijdingen gedrukt te Amsterdam voor Jan van Hilten in de Beursstraat en bij Jan Frederik Stam in de Drukkerij van Vezelaer aan of bij de Zuiderkerk in de Hoope Van 5 Jan 1630–28 Dec 1630.”

days of the year, usually on Fridays, and the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* thus displays a periodicity comparable to the Amsterdam newspapers.⁴

Based on these two complete sets of corantos, and complemented by the few surviving issues of Broer Jansz's *Tijdingen*,⁵ this article will study the serial production, dissemination, and reception of Atlantic news in the Low Countries in the crucial year 1630, when both the United Provinces and the Spanish crown experienced a blend of victories and disappointments.⁶ The West India Company conquered Olinda and Recife in northeast Brazil; Madrid celebrated the safe arrival of a complete shipment of American silver for the first time in nearly three years, a great relief after Piet Heyn had captured the previous New Spain fleet in Matanzas Bay. As a case study of how good and bad news from the Western front circulated in the Low Countries, this article will compare two contrasting ways of covering the same Atlantic events. It will trace two different strategies for obtaining and presenting information, discuss two different perspectives on credibility and partiality, and address questions of how each newspaper solved the discrepancy between the irregular arrival of information and a weekly deadline and what kind of rhetoric the respective newspapermen used to reach their readership, what topics they emphasized or suppressed, and how well-informed readers might assess their weekly bulletins. Finally, in a broader sense, it will address what all of this tells us about the mechanisms of serial news from the early modern Atlantic world?

* * *

The historiography of news and public opinion during the ancien régime has greatly expanded in the last two decades and promises to be the subject of much more scholarship in the foreseeable future. Printed newspapers, the mechanics of their regular communications, and the public interest in serial news have received considerable attention, particularly for seventeenth-century England, in the work of Joad Raymond.⁷ Raymond and others have demonstrated the

⁴Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels, III 33.519 A, a contemporary collection of Verhoeven's *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, containing all 122 issues of 1630. It was probably assembled by the Jesuits in Antwerp based on the evidence of provenance on the volume's opening page. For the precise dates of publication in 1630, see Stéphane Brabant, *L'Imprimeur Abraham Verhoeven (1575-1652) et les débuts de la presse "belge"* (Paris: A.E.E.F, 2009), 407-14.

⁵Only five issues have survived for 1630. Four are in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, C 1103 (no. 1, 5 January; no. 21, 25 May; no. 24, 14 June; no. 34, 24 August), and one in the University Library in Ghent (no. 14, 6 April). I am grateful to Rik Declercq (Ghent) for sending me a scan of this issue. Five out of fifty-two represents a typical survival rate for early seventeenth-century corantos.

⁶Cornelis Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast 1580-1680* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971), 218, calls 1630 "a remarkable year in the history of the Caribbean," a claim which is echoed by Carla Rahn Phillips, *Six Galleons for the King of Spain: Imperial Defense in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 188.

⁷Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641-1649*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005); *News Networks in Seventeenth Century Britain and Europe*, ed. Joad Raymond (London: Routledge, 2006). See also Nicholas Brownlees, *Corantos and Newsbooks:*

addiction to news of early modern readers and have revealed how quickly the periodicals evolved into the most widely circulated and most widely read carriers of information in the first half of the seventeenth century. These in-depth studies, however, focus on a single news culture, strictly curtailed by linguistic and political boundaries. Comparisons with foreign periodicals are included mainly to emphasize the everyday practice of newspapermen to translate and copy bulletins from abroad, but they do not generally investigate the production, dissemination, and reception of news in comparative perspective.

An excellent recent collection of essays on the dissemination of news in early modern Europe does address this issue: Brendan Dooley assembled a team of specialists of various continental news cultures to add an international dimension to the study of the circulation of political information. The contributors focus on the concept of contemporaneity, a term referring to the perception, shared by a number of human beings, of experiencing political events at more or less the same time. New methods of communication in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including regularly printed newspapers, the volume argues, helped to build this sense of contemporaneity. Taken together, the essays offer a panoramic view of the way news stories were transmitted from source to source, from country to country. Dooley, in his introduction, explains that in order to reveal the paths of stories as they traveled through early modern Europe, the comparison of news bulletins is the desired scholarly approach, and continues by pointing to cross-boundary transmission and reception of news as an obvious new direction for research.⁸

This article proposes to take another step in that direction by comparing two ways of presenting, disseminating, and consuming news from the Atlantic world, a topic little studied so far in spite of extensive coverage in seventeenth-century European newspapers. One notable exception is Nicole Greenspan's recent article on the importance of news in the advancement of England's expansion in the Caribbean under Oliver Cromwell. Greenspan concludes that news, and at times its absence, played as much of a role in the unfolding of the "Western design" as commanders, soldiers, seamen, and government officials involved in its planning, direction, and execution. She demonstrates how incomplete and insufficiently reliable information from the Atlantic world promoted an atmosphere of political, economic, and diplomatic instability. Perhaps most pertinently in the context of the present article, she also shows how the news media in England

Language and Discourse in the first English Newspapers (1620–1641) (Pisa: ETS, 1999); Adam Fox, "Rumour, News, and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Culture," *Historical Journal* 40, no. 3 (1997): 597–620; C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁸Brendan Dooley, ed., *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 2.

were far from silent and that rumors and speculations ran wild in the months before the arrival of verified information.⁹

Any news, as David Randall has recently reminded us, must take into account the essential uncertainty of its nature, yet in no other geographical context was that uncertainty more compelling than in the Atlantic world.¹⁰ Fernand Braudel famously claimed that distance was the primary enemy of early modern society: it resulted in every kind of delay, and not until the end of the eighteenth century would the situation significantly improve.¹¹ The geographical distance between the New World and the Old and consequently the gap of weeks or even months between actual events and the moment they were reliably recounted as news in Europe extended the period of uncertainty. The time lag between events and reports and the tension between irregular and infrequent access to information and the rigidity of a weekly deadline at a time when maritime news was in high demand resulted in an exceptional form of reporting. It was not at all uncommon for a fleet to depart from Europe for the Caribbean and not to return for eighteen months, giving patriotic armchair travelers ample time for hope and anxiety, while giving newspapermen headaches on how to track developments that potentially shifted the balance of power at home. Yet in spite of the obstacles generated or increased by geographical distance, readers across the Low Countries remained avid consumers of the latest news from the Western front.

SETTING THE SCENE: TWO CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES

In order to investigate the unrolling of Atlantic events in the Low Countries in 1630, it is useful to briefly set the political scene in the Western Hemisphere. In 1624 the Dutch conquest of Salvador de Bahia, the capital of Portuguese Brazil, caused a shock to the Habsburg territorial monopoly in South America. The swift Luso-Spanish campaign to recapture Bahia forced the Dutch to revert to piracy and privateering, but Piet Heyn's success in securing prizes quickly enabled the West India Company to take up its original plan of establishing a bridgehead in Habsburg America. In the summer of 1629 Admiral Hendrick Lonck embarked

⁹Nicole Greenspan, "News and the Politics of Information in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: The Western Design and the Conquest of Jamaica," *History Workshop Journal* 69 (2010): 1–26. For the sixteenth century, and the role of handwritten newsletters in the dissemination of Atlantic news, see also Renate Pieper, *Die Vermittlung einer Neuen Welt: Amerika im Nachrichtennetz des Habsburgischen Imperiums, 1493–1598* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000).

¹⁰David Randall, *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 5.

¹¹Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: HarperCollins, 1972), pt. 2, chap. 1, 358–69, "Distance, the First Enemy," where he devotes subparagraphs to both the dimensions of the sea and the speed of communication. For the effect distance could have on the nature of news, see the important article by Will Slauter, "Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution," *Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 4 (2009): 759–92.

for Cape Verde, where around Christmas he was joined by Colonel Diederick van Waerdenburgh. Although their destination was officially a secret, it was public knowledge that the Brazilian coastline was vulnerable to attack. Spanish galleons in the area were occupied by another Dutch expedition under Admiral Adriaen Pater, who had wintered in the Caribbean in an effort to capture the next treasure fleet. Sacking and pillaging poorly defended islands, Pater prepared to do more damage in the months to come. In an atmosphere of unbridled optimism, the Dutch contemplated the advent of the new year.¹²

For Philip IV and Olivares, the loss of the New Spain fleet was a massive failure with immediate implications, as they could meet their military obligations in the Netherlands, the empire, northern Italy, and the Caribbean only with recurrent infusions of American silver. The fear that a broad attack on the colonies now lay ahead caused panic in the mother country. Philip authorized his aunt Isabella, governor of the Netherlands, to negotiate a truce to put restrictions on the West India Company, but after heated internal debate the Dutch were unwilling to sacrifice their momentum. At the same time, financial problems in Spain delayed the sending of a new Indies fleet for many months, and when Don Fadrique de Toledo finally set sail in August 1629, it was clear he would not return before winter. The next calendar year would provide a real test of Spain's geopolitical resilience.¹³

Given these contrasting points of departure, anticipation for Atlantic news in the United Provinces was high, and printed newspapers were the most regular means of obtaining information. Both Broer Jansz (1579–1652) and Jan van Hilten (ca. 1602–55) issued newspapers since at least 1618. Both produced a new coranto every Saturday with permission of the Amsterdam city council, a privilege that protected the publishers against pirate editions and local competitors and gave the authorities a limited means of control. The corantos invariably opened with a section of foreign bulletins, where the oldest news was listed first, and reports were preceded by dates and places of correspondence. This section was followed by information from the coranto's own sources. On the whole Van Hilten gave more space to exclusive stories, whereas Jansz focused on continental news from a wider variety of places.¹⁴ Their earliest bulletins on Brazil in 1624

¹²For details on the Dutch expeditions, see Goslinga, *Dutch in the Caribbean*, 206–17. For Brazil's patchy defense system, see Francis Dutra, "Matias de Albuquerque and the Defense of Northeastern Brazil, 1620–1626," *Studia* 36 (1973): 117–66. The most detailed account of the prologue to the Dutch capture of Pernambuco remains George Edmundson, "The Dutch Power in Brazil (continued)," *English Historical Review* 14 (1899): 676–99, but for a more recent assessment, see Michiel van Groesen, "Lessons Learned: The Second Dutch Conquest of Brazil and the Memory of the First," *Colonial Latin American Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 167–93.

¹³For Spanish maritime anxiety in the late 1620s, see Phillips, *Six Galleons*, 7–8, 90–118, 183–84. For the truce talks in the Netherlands, which continued into the 1630s, see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World, 1606–1661* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 223–49.

¹⁴The starting point for research on early Dutch newspapers is *Dutch Corantos 1618–1650, a Bibliography Illustrated with 334 Facsimile Reproductions of Corantos Printed 1618–1625*, ed. Folke

reveal some of the intricacies of Atlantic reporting, as the news stories contained some glaring geographical inaccuracies, yet the same reports also point to the newspapers' independence from the authorities. Twice in the space of a week Van Hilten published stories of erratic leadership and misbehaving Dutch soldiers that the West India Company had wanted to cover up.¹⁵

Abraham Verhoeven (1575–1652), in Antwerp, did not enjoy the same editorial freedom. In applying to the archdukes in Brussels for a license, Verhoeven emphasized the propaganda usefulness of his newspaper, the *Nieuwe Tijdinghen* (New tidings), which appeared two or three times a week, and when looking at his occasional Atlantic bulletins it becomes clear what he meant. The Dutch conquest of Bahia, according to Verhoeven, amounted to little more than the sacking of a few churches, and four years later he was equally ambiguous about what had happened at Matanzas. In 1629 the council of Brabant ordered him to stop producing “news reports most incorrect and without any proper prior visitation.” Later that year he relaunched his coranto under a different title, *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*. Verhoeven did not make a clear distinction between domestic and foreign news and mentioned Antwerp as one of many places where he gathered information. As a result it was virtually impossible for readers to discover which news had been copied and which was truly new.¹⁶

NO NEWS: MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING

News from the Atlantic world received more attention in Amsterdam than in Antwerp. In 1630 Van Hilten included tidings in forty-nine weekly issues, whereas Verhoeven did so on only nineteen occasions. But both newspapers depended on the usually unpredictable and in any case infrequent arrivals of ships for good copy. Much of the rhythm of news from the West Indies was conditioned by the

Dahl (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1946), with biographies of Van Hilten (33–35) and Jansz (55–56). See also Otto Lankhorst, “Newspapers in the Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Dooley and Sabrina Baron (London: Routledge, 2001), 151–59; D. H. Couvée, “The First Coranteens—The Flow of the News in the 1620s,” *Gazette International Journal for Mass Communication Studies* 8 (1962): 22–36.

¹⁵Michiel van Groesen, “A Week to Remember: Dutch Publishers and the Competition for News from Brazil, 26 August–2 September 1624,” *Quaerendo* 40, no. 1 (2010): 29–36.

¹⁶The quote is from Arblaster, “Policy and Publishing in the Habsburg Netherlands, 1585–1690,” in *The Politics of Information*, ed. Dooley and Baron, 185. For an exhaustive bibliography of Verhoeven's corantos, see Brabant, *L'imprimeur Abraham Verhoeven*. See also K. van Damme and J. Deploige, “Slecht nieuws, geen nieuws. Abraham Verhoeven (1575–1652) en de Nieuwe Tijdinghen: Periodieke pers en propaganda in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden tijdens de vroege zeventiende eeuw,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 113, no. 1 (1998): 1–22. Amsterdam effectively succeeded Antwerp as the main information hub in northern Europe; see John J. McCusker, “The Demise of Distance: The Business Press and the Origins of the Information Revolution in the Early Modern Atlantic World,” *American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (2005): 295–321.

three-month-long hurricane season from early August to the end of October.¹⁷ Only thereafter would large expeditions be undertaken, and by then bad weather in Europe could result in further delays. After a fleet had crossed the ocean, news of its exploits took seven to nine weeks on average to arrive in the Low Countries. All of this meant that Atlantic headlines could not generally be expected until March or even April at the earliest. So Van Hilten's promise to readers, in his opening issue of 1630, to follow up on his reports the next week, signaled a commercial strategy rather than a genuine belief that news would arrive. In *Courante* no. 2, he offered little or nothing and opted to gloss over this lack of news by creating his own:

From Antwerp, 6 January: It hasn't happened for many years that for a period of twelve months, not a single [Spanish] ship with goods or treasure has arrived from the West Indies, either for the king or for private investors, instead of more than one-hundred richly laden ships, as was the rule. However, over there one has good hope that the same will arrive towards March.¹⁸

Such writing served two purposes. First, it kept the Atlantic in the spotlight and nurtured the "collective anticipation," as Van Hilten judged that readers wanted to know the latest, even if there was nothing to report. By including such reminders, he assured his clientele that he was keeping track of Atlantic developments, implying that if news did arrive, they would have to look no farther than his newspaper. Other issues in January and February reveal the same strategy, emphasizing routine efforts by the West India Company to provision ships in support of the two Atlantic fleets and the arrival of sugar traders in Lisbon who reported rather gratuitously that Pernambuco was ready to withstand a Dutch onslaught.¹⁹ Secondly, the bulletin was sufficiently vague so as not to jeopardize the *Courante's* credibility. Credibility was a major concern for Van Hilten, particularly at times when the chances of good news arriving shortly resulted in hopeful Atlantic rumors. It presented him with the challenge of reproducing these in print without risking his reputation as a careful reporter. Van Hilten opted to meticulously describe the trails of such tales, adding dates and sources to enable readers to judge the stories' credibility for themselves. In March, when no news

¹⁷See for a recent analysis of what he terms "the underlying ecology of the Atlantic World," Stephen D. Behrendt, "Ecology, Seasonality, and the Transatlantic Slave Trade," in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 44–85, esp. 48.

¹⁸*Courante*, no. 2 (12 January).

¹⁹*Courante*, no. 3 (19 January) and no. 5 (2 February).

had arrived from Pernambuco and tensions began to rise, Atlantic reporting in the *Courante* became extremely conscientious:

From Antwerp, 3 March: Since my most recent [issue] two deliveries of post from Madrid have arrived in Brussels; the latest one was sent from there on the 11th of last [month], and brings no tidings from the West Indies, other than that at the beginning of February some forty ships had arrived in Lisbon from Brazil, including some which had left Pernambuco on 1 January, and until that time nothing had been heard along the coast of Dutch ships; so that from the tidings mentioned before, nothing is certain.²⁰

Van Hilten sacrificed any lingering stylistic ambitions he may have harbored to trace the origins of information back to New Year's Day in Pernambuco. News from Brazil could reach Lisbon a full month before it arrived in Amsterdam, and since no ships had entered Dutch ports, Van Hilten had little choice but to find out if tidings from Spain had reached the southern Netherlands.²¹ Nearly half of his Atlantic bulletins originated in Antwerp. Alternatively, when ships docked in Amsterdam, communications followed the opposite course. Despite his singular focus on "Spanish" news, a third of Abraham Verhoeven's bulletins still came from the United Provinces. Atlantic news in the Low Countries, then, sporadic and infrequent, was often filtered by an enemy whose reports could not necessarily be trusted. Confirming it thus became an immediate priority, as a story's credibility increased by attributing it to multiple, and potentially more reliable, sources. For the *Courante's* next issue in March, Van Hilten obtained confirmation from Zeeland that, indeed, no news from the Atlantic had reached Lisbon as yet. Ever so conveniently, this also provided him with another bulletin.²²

The most important Atlantic news, in this phase, was the enduring lack of it. But while Van Hilten constructed a weekly rhythm of reports, Verhoeven's *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* contained only a single bulletin between January and April. He claimed his "news" came from Osuna, but what he printed could have originated anywhere in Spain, and could have been written at any time during the first quarter of the year:

Without doubt, one expects the treasure fleet towards April, since letters and dispatch boats have arrived from Havana. As reported from Cádiz, news is coming in that it is all peace and quiet in the Indies, and that 25 Dutch ships, which roamed the coasts in the area for prizes, have now left without getting any sort of result; one holds for a certainty that some of them have perished in storms and bad weather.²³

²⁰*Courante*, no. 10 (9 March).

²¹Charles Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil, 1624–1654* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 23–24.

²²*Courante*, no. 11 (16 March).

²³*Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 14 (20 February).

Instead of following where news had not (yet) arrived to appeal to the imagination of what the future might bring, Verhoeven explained that the reason he had been mute was that nothing actually happened. The only story line he was interested in, the arrival of American silver, seemed unlikely to come to fruition soon. For the time being, readers of the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* were left to mull over indistinct “letters and ships” and untraceable “coasts in the area,” and Verhoeven did not include any conventional elements to enhance his credibility. However, in terms of actual information gathered, the result was not very different. Presented with the same ocean of uncertainty, both newspapers attracted readers by keeping an eye on events that could lead to victories. Potential setbacks waiting to happen were not anticipated in print: Verhoeven did not refer to Brazil, while Van Hilten made no mention of the approaching treasure fleet.

HARD NEWS: PARTIALITY AND THE ISSUE OF CREDIBILITY

In the same week that Verhoeven assured his readers that all was peace and quiet in the Indies, the West India Company registered its two main victories of the year. Adriaen Pater raided and captured the strategic island of Santa Marta near Cartagena, while Hendrick Lonck and Diederick van Waerdenburgh overwhelmed Olinda, the capital of Pernambuco.²⁴ Few events generated as much newspaper coverage as an Atlantic victory. In 1624, also after a prolonged period of anticipation, Jan van Hilten had taken the unusual step of issuing a *Courante Extraordinarij* to quickly spread the news from Bahia. This time the good news reached Amsterdam just in time for the regular Saturday edition of 27 April, of which the entire verso side was devoted to Brazil (fig. 1).²⁵ Van Hilten’s treatment was very matter-of-fact, reporting on every stage of the invasion in the same manner as the officially approved version of events published by the West India Company several days later. The triumph was cause for nationwide celebrations, as the States-General sanctioned a day of public prayer and ordered soldiers along the frontiers to fire their cannons to communicate the victory and demoralize enemy troops. Details of events in Brazil must have reached Antwerp very soon, but here Abraham Verhoeven made no mention of defeat whatsoever. Not in his *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* of 26 April, not on 2 May, and not in the weeks that followed. While Van Hilten eagerly assembled more information to present a complete picture of the campaign, Verhoeven reported from Dordrecht in May that “not much special was happening here.” It was not until a full month later that

²⁴Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 214; Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 37–41.

²⁵*Courante*, no. 17 (27 April). A facsimile of the special Tuesday issue of August 1624 is in *Dutch corantos*, no. 35. See also, Van Groesen, “A Week to Remember,” 29–31. The scoop of the good news from Brazil was not scored by Van Hilten or Jansz, but by the Amsterdam bookseller and occasional coranteer François Lieshout, whose *Seeckere tijdinghe vande Vlote . . .* is dated 25 April 1630. A copy of this news sheet is kept in the University Library in Ghent.

Figure 1. Jan van Hilten, *Courante van Italien, Duytschlandt, &c.*, 27 April 1630 (verso).

Verhoeven acknowledged defeat in print—not as a newsworthy event, but as part of a report on the ongoing efforts in Spain to swiftly “recapture Pernambuco.”²⁶

* * *

In the more authoritarian society promoted by the archdukes in the southern Netherlands, credibility at least partly depended on the demonstration of being committed to the common interest. The all-encompassing religious conflict had turned increasingly bitter in the late 1620s in both Germany and northern Italy, meaning that the divide between Protestants and Catholics had sharpened and extended to the way events were reported. Both parties were engaged in what Steven Shapin has described as “the public withdrawal of trust in another’s access

²⁶*Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 44 (24 May) and no. 45 (1 June).

to the world and in another's moral commitment to speaking truth about it."²⁷ Whereas Van Hilten attempted to build a new standard of credibility based on providing details such as sources and dates and places of correspondence, Verhoeven applied a more traditional partisan rhetoric, still considered very appealing as part of a culture of belonging in post-Reformation Europe.²⁸ Both north and south of the border, victories were reported more often and more extensively than defeats, but only Verhoeven systematically discounted bad news, a clear example of the propaganda usefulness he had promised the authorities at the start of his career.

A comparison between the Amsterdam and Antwerp corantos on one specific Atlantic event reveals how different levels of partiality can also be gauged from the words the publishers used when constructing their reports. In the first half of June, all three newspapers—including Jansz's *Tijdingen*—made mention of Adriaen Pater's return to the United Provinces after a Caribbean expedition of nearly two years that was neither a resounding success nor a complete failure.²⁹ Pater had not managed to capture the treasure fleet as company executives had hoped, but his presence in the area had succeeded in postponing its departure. He had rattled the Spaniards by forcing the surrender of Santa Marta, but had not joined forces with Lonck to mount a combined attack, something which the directors had specifically ordered. Van Hilten, anticipating the admiral's return, recounted on 8 June how Pater had conquered Santa Marta, but had to abandon the island due to a lack of supplies. The following week, he restricted his coverage to one, bone-dry sentence: "Admiral Pater has arrived here this week with most of his ships."³⁰ That same Saturday, Broer Jansz presented Pater's campaign as a success. Jansz had served as coranteer to the Prince of Orange and was more conspicuously patriotic than Van Hilten. News he printed was routinely mistrusted in the southern Netherlands, where satirical pamphleteers once advised him "to lie some more about Brazil, since it is far enough away from here."³¹ Jansz described Pater's return more extensively:

Several times this week soldiers . . . have marched in full attire and with flying colors to the West India House, where each soldier received one Rijksdaalder as a welcome gift on top of his pay, and each officer two. The company directors, hearing that the admiral would come from Edam to Amsterdam, have sent some from their midst to Nieuwendam

²⁷Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6. For an extensive discussion of the problem of credibility in early modern England, see Randall, *Credibility*, 95–120.

²⁸Andrew Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211–17.

²⁹Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 207–16.

³⁰*Courante*, no. 24 (15 June).

³¹Henk Borst, "Broer Jansz in Antwerpse ogen: De Amsterdamse courantier na de slag bij Kallo in 1638 neergezet als propagandist," *De zeventiende eeuw* 25, no. 1 (2009): 86.

to receive the admiral magnificently, accompany him to Amsterdam, and bring him to the West India House, where in the evening they all spent a merry dinner together.³²

At least, Broer Jansz insisted, there was reason to be joyful after so many months of anticipation. Two weeks later Abraham Verhoeven vehemently disagreed, as he reported Pater's return in a tone that was anything but objective. He derided the admiral for his lack of success and wasted no time in reminding readers that everything was being done to deny the Dutch further success in Pernambuco, too:

Tidings from Amsterdam: Here Admiral Pater has arrived with the stockings on his head [i.e., with a flea in his ear], ensuring that the West India Company will not make a song out of this, as it has cost a lot and rendered little or nothing. Should the same happen to Pernambuco, the company would burst, because here we understand that in Andalucia, Biscay, Portugal, and other corners of Spain great preparations are being made to go to sea, and that Don Fadrique will immediately depart for Pernambuco once his fleet has arrived in Spain.³³

This bulletin is indicative of Verhoeven's Atlantic reporting in two ways. Throughout the year, he ridiculed the Dutch when they did not achieve the sort of success they had hoped for, using stinging rhetoric foreign to the Amsterdam corantos. Then he quickly reverted to giving optimistic updates on the approaching treasure fleet. Under the command of Don Fadrique de Toledo and Antonio de Oquendo, the combined New Spain and Tierra Firme fleets, which carried two years' worth of gold and silver, had applied extreme caution, spending months in first Cartagena and then Havana. The commanders considered the risk of an oceanic crossing so great that they left behind eight large ships with part of the treasure. But the return voyage turned out to be uneventful, and in early August the fleet reached Cádiz, where a delighted crowd awaited, kneeling and praying in gratitude. The safe arrival of the fleet even generated a *relación de sucesos*, a form of printed news in Spain that was usually reserved for military victories and royal visits, thus emphasizing the political significance of the event.³⁴

In the culture of anticipation that characterized and shaped Atlantic news, the treasure fleet was to Verhoeven what Brazil had been to his counterparts in

³²*Tijdingen*, no. 24 (15 June).

³³*Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 56 (28 June).

³⁴The news pamphlet is titled *Relacion verdadera y cierta de la desseada y felice venida de la Flota de Nueva España, y galeones de Tierra Firme, y de la Armada Real del Mar Oceano* (Granada, 1630). I am grateful to Francesca Trivellato for providing me with a copy. On printed news in Golden Age Spain, see Henry Ettinghausen, "The News in Spain: Relaciones de sucesos in the Reigns of Philip III and IV," *European History Quarterly* 14 (1984): 1–20. On the fleet's arrival, see Phillips, *Six Galleons*, 186–87, and Elvira Vilches, *New World Gold: Cultural Anxiety and Monetary Disorder in Early Modern Spain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 300–301.

Amsterdam. Every Atlantic story in the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* was devoted partly, or more often exclusively, to Don Fadrique. Over the course of the summer, when the fleet's arrival became a matter of when rather than if, Verhoeven began to speculate about its revenues. On 17 August he announced confidently, and with more precision than usual:

Tidings from Seville from July: On 28 June a dispatch boat has arrived from Don Fadrique de Toledo, carrying letters from the aforementioned Don Fadrique that he hoped the fleet would reach Spain at the end of July or the beginning of August, with God's support, and that the fleet comprised more than one hundred ships and carried more than twenty million [reales].³⁵

Finally, on the penultimate day of the month, Verhoeven could break the official news of the fleet's return. A year had passed since Don Fadrique had left for the Indies, and anticipation for his homecoming had been high from the moment he set sail, a sentiment that was magnified by the collective memory of disaster at Matanzas. Verhoeven celebrated the cathartic occasion with a four-page issue completely dedicated to the good news from Cádiz (fig. 2). But his many column inches could not hide that the main news it contained, the actual amount of treasure, was disappointing:

From Brussels, 24 August: Monsieur, here tidings have come from Spain that the fleet of gold and silver has arrived there at the beginning of August, without the loss of a ship, being richly laden, and one expects another fleet to arrive in October or November. . . . The entire amount is nine million, nine hundred and four thousand one hundred and ninety-four reales. . . . One awaits further notice from the fleet of this year with the next post.³⁶

Verhoeven opened his bulletin with a brief salutation to invoke the credibility of an ordinary letter, but readers who had followed the fleet's approach from week to week must have noticed that its revenues amounted to less than half the sum the publisher had predicted in previous corantos. What was presented as a climax had a distinctly anti-climactic feel to it. The wait for the next fleet—and with it yet another period of anticipation for Atlantic news—started right away.³⁷

READING NEWSPAPERS: THE ATLANTIC AT HOME

Publishers tried to keep readers hungry for more information to ensure the consistent purchase of their weekly editions. There were many ways of getting

³⁵*Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 78 (17 August).

³⁶*Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 83 (30 August).

³⁷The second fleet, under Don Tomás de Larráspuru, arrived in Spain in December, too late to be included in newspapers in 1630. See Phillips, *Six Galleons*, 187.

Figure 2. Abraham Verhoeven, *Wekelijcke Tijdinge*, 30 August 1630, p. 1.

information on foreign affairs—hearsay and rumors, sermons and songs, pamphlets and prints—but the corantos were the only regular and most widely available carriers of Atlantic news. In the United Provinces, publishers from various towns provided local outlets for the Amsterdam newspapers in exchange for advertisements of their books in the periodicals. Every week Van Hilten sent twelve copies of the *Courante* to a colleague in Leeuwarden, for example, and twenty-six copies on average to another bookseller in Nijmegen. Other channels of distribution were more informal: the schoolmaster David Beck, in The Hague, received Van Hilten's newspaper from his uncle in Amsterdam and sat down with friends “until [they] had read the printed *Courante* in its entirety.”³⁸

³⁸David Beck, *Spiegel van mijn leven: Een Haags dagboek uit 1624*, ed. and trans. Sv. E. Veldhuijzen (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), 143. See also Jeroen Blaak, *Literacy in Everyday Life: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Dutch Diaries* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 94.

The corantos were also being read abroad: both Van Hilten and Jansz published French editions, and their reports were regularly translated for German and English gazettes. The weekly flow of news was considered so valuable that it could be sold for a profit, for example by the political agent Michel le Blon, who sent parcels from Amsterdam to the Swedish chancellor Axel Oxenstierna every Saturday, including that day's copies of the two newspapers.³⁹ Of the spread of Abraham Verhoeven's news in the southern Netherlands nothing is known, but for his international distribution he relied on the trusted Tassis postal system, which connected the southern Netherlands to just about every major news hub on the Continent. English coranteers, in spite of their Protestant sympathies, regularly copied his reports too.⁴⁰

In the highly literate Low Countries, as in England, the corantos were intended for a large readership at all levels of society, but here too early modern reading remains an elusive topic.⁴¹ Only a few years ago David Randall stated, "we will never have more than a hazy idea of who read military news."⁴² Fortunately, there is one reader in the United Provinces who commented on a regular basis on what newspapers reported and how he assessed their credibility. That reader is Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft (1581–1647), arguably the leading Dutch poet, playwright, and historian of his generation, and no stranger to politics either. His father, Cornelis, served eight terms as burgomaster of Amsterdam, and Pieter himself was in 1609 appointed sheriff (*drost*) of Muiden, a relatively undemanding position that enabled him to write his plays and, later on, the *Neederlandsche Histoorien*, a monumental twenty-seven-volume description of the Dutch Revolt. Since the castle of Muiden where Hooft resided lay more than ten miles east of Amsterdam, he relied on letters and newspapers to follow foreign affairs. The Amsterdam merchant Joost Baek, Pieter's brother-in-law, sent him newspapers every week, and it is in letters to Baek that Hooft comments on the weekly tidings.⁴³

³⁹Couvée, "The First Coranteers," 27–32; Dahl, *Dutch corantos*, 34; Lankhorst, "Newspapers in the Netherlands"; Nicholas Brownlees, *The Language of Periodical News in Seventeenth-Century England* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 25–53; Marika Koblusek, "The Business of News: Michel le Blon and the Transmission of Political Information to Sweden in the 1630s," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 28 (2003): 205–13.

⁴⁰Paul Arblaster, "Antwerp and Brussels as Inter-European Spaces in News Exchange," in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Dooley (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 202–3; Van Damme and Deploige, "Slecht nieuws," 18–19.

⁴¹Michael Frearson, "The Distribution and Readership of London Corantos in the 1620s," in *Serials and Their Readers, 1620–1914*, ed. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1993), 1–25.

⁴²Randall, *Credibility*, 14.

⁴³Hendrik W. van Tricht, *Het leven van P. C. Hooft*, 2nd rev. ed. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), 155–65. Hooft's correspondence has been edited and published in exemplary fashion by Hendrik W. van Tricht, et al., eds., *De briefwisseling van Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft*, 3 vols. (Culemborg: Tjeenk Willink, 1976–79).

What sort of newspaper reader was Pieter Hooft? For someone of Hooft's lineage, the essence of credibility was trust, which depended on social authority. Anonymous reports in printed corantos issued by publishers with an eye for commerce were perceived as distinctly inferior to traditional letters written by people whose status guaranteed their credibility. Hooft, then, was a highly critical reader, who repeatedly complained that newspapers reported lies—a common trope—and were always one step behind the news. A comparison of his news consumption to that of Hugo Grotius, whose overriding interest in 1630 was in the secret Dutch-Spanish truce talks that hardly made the news,⁴⁴ shows that Hooft attached a lot of weight to the military and political incidents that formed the corantos' staple of news. Reviewing the contemporary media landscape, Hooft rated Jan van Hilten's newspaper as more reliable than that of Broer Jansz, but admitted that "one can always find something in one newspaper that is not available in the other."⁴⁵ His critical attitude towards the Amsterdam corantos did not stop him from reading both, and he read foreign newspapers, too. No wonder that he occasionally confessed to Baek that the papers had occupied him until late at night.⁴⁶

Hooft concentrated mainly on events unfolding in Europe, especially in the war of the Mantuan succession. He made no mention in his letters of the Dutch victory in Brazil, and only once in 1630 did he comment directly on the activities of the West India Company, one day before Jan van Hilten published an English rumor—false as it later turned out—of Admiral Pater's raid on the island of Trinidad.⁴⁷ "I hear that the West India Company has captured another island," Hooft wrote indifferently. He was concerned not so much by the attack as by the fact that the newspapers sheepishly copied an unsubstantiated report, and, on top of that, were late (again) in doing so. He used the rumor of Pater's invasion as a scathing metaphor for lazy journalism:

The Dutch corantos shall not ground here. In Amsterdam, even though they are scroungers, they are in like-minded company, and being educated there, who knows where they might be of use for the ensuing business they contain. For me, they have been discharged, if ever they had been recruited. With such company, I would not dare to muster any attack that required a serious effort.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Bernard L. Meulenbroek, ed., *Briefwisseling van Hugo Grotius*, vol. 4, 1629–1630–1631 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).

⁴⁵Hooft to Baek, 25 August 1631 (Van Tricht, *Briefwisseling*, no. 474). See also Dahl, *Dutch corantos*, 17–18.

⁴⁶Hooft to Baek, 18 August 1630 (Van Tricht, *Briefwisseling*, no. 378).

⁴⁷*Courante*, no. 19 (11 May 1630). In reality Pater only passed Trinidad en route to Santa Marta; see Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 214.

⁴⁸Hooft to Baek, 10 May 1630 (Van Tricht, *Briefwisseling*, no. 356).

Hooft, of course, did not stop reading newspapers as he so menacingly suggested. Several intriguing letters of September and October 1630 show exactly why he continued to read them. They deal with a niggling uncertainty over the exact amount of treasure Don Fadrique had brought to Spain. Just like Verhoeven, Jansz and Van Hilten had followed the fleet's progress throughout the year, so Hooft had been well informed about its whereabouts.⁴⁹ In May, Van Hilten reported that the admiral had anchored in Havana and would soon set sail for Europe, "even though many in Portugal and Spain are so dejected by the loss of Pernambuco that they cannot believe it and hold it for a lie." In June, he passed on rumors from Antwerp—not mentioned by Verhoeven—that the fleet was still in Cartagena, that the story that it had already called in Havana was made public only "in order to encourage the populace" in Spain, and that Don Fadrique would not arrive until September or October. Van Hilten, unlike his Antwerp colleague, did not speculate on the fleet's likely revenues until late August, when rumors of its imminent arrival intensified. Then he first copied Verhoeven's estimated sum of twenty million reales, but rectified the story the following week with a formal announcement of the exact amount.⁵⁰

The inconsistent reports about the amount of treasure puzzled Pieter Hooft. On 10 September, three days after Van Hilten's announcement of the correct sum had appeared, he expressed his doubts about the figure the newspaper had mentioned. To his brother-in-law he wrote:

With this letter I return to you the corantos, which I fear have gotten so used to lying, that in their estimation of the Indian treasures, they have told us less than the truth. Because 9 million and 900 M. reales is much lower than eighteen million, which was reported to you from Antwerp. Indeed, others have told me, with stiff jaws, of twenty. When you know something more definite, I would like to hear it.⁵¹

It is clear what happened here. Baek and Hooft, always eager for news, had heard the reports of twenty million reales that had been put into print on an almost weekly basis by Verhoeven for more than a month. Whether or not their source was the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* is unclear, but the huge difference in the amounts which had suddenly arisen unsettled Hooft. Moreover, the actual revenue was much lower than that of previous treasure fleets.⁵² Hooft routinely blamed the

⁴⁹Michel Morineau, *Incroyables gazettes et fabuleux métaux: Les retours des trésors américains d'après les gazettes hollandaises (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985), 60–71. A comparison between *Courante* no. 14 and *Tijdingen* no. 14 (both 6 April) indicates that Jansz sometimes had more Atlantic news than Van Hilten. Here, too, Jansz's rhetoric regarding the treasure fleet was distinctly more partisan than that of his colleague.

⁵⁰*Courante*, no. 21 (25 May), no. 26 (29 June), no. 35 (31 August), and no. 36 (7 September).

⁵¹Hooft to Baek, 10 September 1630 (Van Tricht, *Briefwisseling*, no. 388).

⁵²Morineau, *Incroyables gazettes*, 61, mentions the following amounts as reported by the Amsterdam newspapers: November 1626: 17.217.686 reales; November 1627: 13.300.806 reales;

Amsterdam newspapers for the confusion, but five days later, he had learned that for once they were accurate:

Who knows what to expect next if the newspapers have learned to speak the truth on the cargo of the Indian fleet? Because surely the rumors from the Spanish side have been dispersed to make their riches look grand, and cannot be more wrong.⁵³

Hooft's grudging surprise that the newspapers had mentioned the true amount quickly gave way to his delight that the Spanish crown did not receive the massive financial injection he had first feared. Two weeks later, he acknowledged that the newspapers should occasionally be trusted:

[The newspapers] hold [an armistice in the Mantuan war] for the imagination of the Austrians, to keep heart for those on their side, as they did when they manufactured the riches of the Indian fleet.⁵⁴

By now, Hooft unequivocally blamed Habsburg propaganda—and not the Amsterdam newspapers—for rigging the figures. In October, in another diatribe against unreliable corantos, he made an exception for news which had just arrived from Antwerp—and which had reached him through Van Hilten's *Courante* five days earlier—that the Spanish crown was temporarily withholding from private investors their share of the treasure: "There is certainty in Antwerp that the merchant in Spain will have to shed some of his silver feathers."⁵⁵ In just over a month of reading news on the treasure fleet, Hooft had gone from accusing the Amsterdam corantos of lying to accepting that what they reported was reliable. Episodes such as this one were a reward for Van Hilten's efforts to check his sources and attribute his Atlantic bulletins and probably go a long way towards explaining why even well-informed readers continued to read the weekly newspapers.

THE FOLLOW-UP: DIGESTING ATLANTIC NEWS

As autumn arrived in Europe, the major Atlantic events of the year had passed. Both Van Hilten and Verhoeven reverted to their low-key reporting of the first three months of the year, with one marked difference. The Dutch capture of Pernambuco had transformed the balance of power to the extent that Verhoeven had to acknowledge Brazil as another frontline. The bias remained—on both

September 1628: 0 reales; April 1629: 12.488.000 reales.

⁵³Hooft to Baek, 15 September 1630 (Van Tricht, *Briefwisseling*, no. 390). The figure of eight million constitutes the difference between the actual treasure and the amount reported in the corantos.

⁵⁴Hooft to Baek, 29 September 1630 (Van Tricht, *Briefwisseling*, no. 398).

⁵⁵Hooft to Baek, 17 October 1630 (Van Tricht, *Briefwisseling*, no. 413); *Courante*, no. 41 (12 October).

sides of the border—and customary anticipations once again pointed in opposite directions. According to the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, the Dutch faced hunger and drought in Pernambuco, whereas in the *Courante* this plight was reserved for the Portuguese in the province's interior. In this case both were right.⁵⁶ And while some of the newspapers' contents were diametrically contradictory, the reverse happened as well. Since both the Amsterdam and Antwerp corantos now presented readers with a weekly trickle of information, it became appealing to copy each other's reports. Copying was one of the everyday mechanisms of newspaper making in early modern Europe, and the infrequency of Atlantic news made it at times inevitable. Van Hilten, however, was prudent enough not to rely on Verhoeven's coranto. Of his thirty Atlantic bulletins from Antwerp, only the erroneous figure of the treasure fleet's revenues can be traced to the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*. Verhoeven was not nearly as restrained: he literally copied Van Hilten's news or modified it to make Dutch setbacks appear more momentous than they were in reality. Two last examples will suffice. On Saturday, 16 November, Van Hilten reported, "The [Dutch] vessel *Orangienboom* with 24 cannons, destined for Pernambuco with victuals, has some days ago perished off Dunkirk."⁵⁷ The news from Dunkirk had already reached Antwerp, where Verhoeven had put it in print and interpreted it as a boost for the Habsburg cause in Brazil. The *Courante*, however, was the first to mention the ship's name and size, giving Verhoeven the chance to fill in the details. On 29 November, two weeks after he had broken the news himself, Verhoeven transcribed Van Hilten's report, added the correct date and place of correspondence, and sunk the *Orangienboom* for the second time. Readers of the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* were left with the impression that the West India Company had lost two ships with provisions in quick succession.⁵⁸ On top of such manipulations, Verhoeven also remained highly selective in his coverage of Atlantic events. Late in November, Van Hilten once again conveyed a minor disappointment for the Dutch, as their admiral Pieter Ita, returning from Brazil, "confirmed the loss of a small fleet near Honduras, and also brought tidings that until 15 September, the treasure fleet had not arrived in Havana."⁵⁹ Verhoeven copied the statement two weeks later: "[Ita] roamed the West Indian coast towards Havana until 15 September, when storms, and the lack of potential gain, made him leave. These ships bring confirmation of the loss of the previous fleet which was going to Honduras."⁶⁰ Verhoeven indicated he had copied the information from Dutch corantos. He used the exact words as Van Hilten, intimated that Ita had indeed sailed along the Cuban coast at the date mentioned in the Dutch bulletin but then deliberately omitted its final sentence, which hinted at

⁵⁶*Courante*, no. 51 (21 December); *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 114 (29 November). Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 41.

⁵⁷*Courante*, no. 46 (16 November).

⁵⁸*Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 109 (15 November) and no. 115 (29 November).

⁵⁹*Courante*, no. 48 (30 November).

⁶⁰*Wekelijcke Tijdinghe*, no. 120 (13 December).

new delays for the year's second treasure fleet. Clearly, the Antwerp publisher was not interested in every story from the Western front. Instead, he manipulated the flow of news to construct an imaginary Atlantic that was systematically biased in favor of the Spanish monarchy.

* * *

In the Low Countries, weekly newspapers reported on the Atlantic world on a regular basis. Jan van Hilten and Abraham Verhoeven had a decade of experience in reporting foreign affairs by means of a printed periodical and recognized the significance of the Atlantic world as an arena for news. Their newspapers demonstrated distinct variations in their coverage of events, meaning that different publics—occasionally at different times—were told different versions of the same events. In Antwerp, the *Wekelijcke Tijdinghe* exhibited a form of committed journalism inherent to a traditional culture of belonging, where good news was eagerly anticipated and bad news was blatantly suppressed. The Amsterdam newspapers, although far from impartial, did not display the same rigorous prejudice. The editorial strategy of the *Courante*, which reported from the Western front even when there was little or no copy, was fueled by commercial considerations. Here too, good news was followed more closely than bad, but in order to keep selling newspapers to a well-informed readership, Van Hilten worked hard to establish a new standard of credibility. His painstaking methods included providing readers with details of when and where rumors and reports circulated and not withholding news of defeats.

To compensate for the gaps in the arrival of fresh Atlantic news, many of the bulletins in the Low Countries originated across the border. Copying bulletins from other media, one of the cornerstones of early modern newspaper making, was an obvious solution to a chronic lack of hard news. Comparing the methods of two leading European newspapermen is particularly instructive here. Reports from across the border offered a convenient opportunity for Abraham Verhoeven to manipulate the state of Atlantic affairs. Jan van Hilten, in contrast to what historians have generally argued for early modern newspaper journalism, successfully withstood the temptation to borrow reports from his Antwerp counterpart, even though he relied on the southern Netherlands for nearly half of his Atlantic bulletins. When possible, he gathered his news from multiple sources and attempted to find confirmation at home of what he had learned from Spain through Brussels or Antwerp. Van Hilten's efforts to ensure accuracy paid off. Even a critical reader like Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft had to admit on occasion that the Amsterdam newspapers did a respectable job.

Despite the contrasting strategies of newspapermen north and south of the border, there were similarities, too. Both in Amsterdam and in Antwerp, Atlantic reporting was characterized by unusually extended periods of anticipation. Hopes for the future determined the weekly concerns of the present, and developments that could potentially lead to victories were covered more systematically than disappointments that were likely to materialize—an idiosyncratic form of

the partiality that defined the early modern press in general to varying degrees. In the final weeks before newspapermen expected good news from the Atlantic to be confirmed, they frantically gathered every available piece of information and constructed in print a weekly buildup to a long-awaited event. When hard news finally did disembark—of the successful invasion of an enemy colony or the arrival of much-needed American silver—months of anxiety erupted into a climactic form of reporting. Few events generated the extensive treatment reserved for good news from the Western front, in the form of special newspaper issues or regular issues completely devoted to a single news story. Once an Atlantic victory had been celebrated or, alternatively, defeat and disappointment had been digested, a new period of prolonged, commercially attractive anticipation could commence. ♀